



## Students guide on Virtual Mobility



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## INTRODUCTION

This guide is addressed to students interested in learning more about Virtual Mobility (VM). The guide will inform about what Virtual Mobility is, how students can benefit from it, how it can be integrated in study programmes or courses and how to find Virtual Mobility opportunities.

We hope that by the time you have worked through this booklet, you will have a better understanding of Virtual Mobility and how it can be beneficial to you in your academic and career planning.

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## VIRTUAL MOBILITY IN A NUTSHELL

### What is Virtual Mobility?

Virtual Mobility can be defined as<sup>1</sup>:

“a set of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) supported activities, organized at institutional level, that realize or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching and/or learning.”

The term “activities” refers to teaching, learning or research, but can also refer to organisational, logistical or administrative issues related to international education.

The activities can be

- ❖ **fully virtual** (entirely at a distance and digital, without the need to travel) or
- ❖ **blended** (ICT is used to support physical mobility).

The aim of Virtual Mobility is to foster international and collaborative experiences to facilitate the recognition of differences between cultures and to stimulate the development of intercultural competences.

Virtual Mobility can facilitate (fully or blended) physical international exchanges, international internships and the internationalization of the curriculum (a course or part of it, seminars,

<sup>1</sup> Johannes De Gruyter, Mart Achten, Ilse Op de Beeck, and Wim Van Petegem. “Virtual Mobility: Definition and Types.” In: Achten M., Op de Beeck I., Van Petegem W. (ed.), Home & Away Forum: Conference Proceedings. EuroPACE ivzw, 2011, Heverlee.



workshops,...) and is very important because it acts like a **multiplier of international opportunities**, giving almost to everyone the possibility to have an experience of collaboration with people from different cultures and background and to enrich their intercultural, language and ICT skills even without moving from home.

Keywords for Virtual Mobility are: **ICT, internationalization, collaboration, intercultural, teaching and learning.**

### What can be “virtualized” and how?

Virtual mobility activities can be categorized, based on the type of activities that are “virtualized”. Following typology shows that virtual mobility can be seen both as an alternative and as a complement to the more traditional exchange programmes such as Erasmus.

- ❖ Related to international student or staff exchanges virtual mobility can be used to **facilitate a physical international exchange (blended)**. When the student goes physically abroad, ICT can be a support during the different phases of the mobility programme: before (for example during the selection process or a preparatory training on culture and language), during (staying in contact with students and teachers at the home university) or after (evaluation and follow-up process).

But virtual mobility can also be used to **realize an international exchange (virtual)**. In this case the student follows a complete (or substantial parts of a) programme entirely at a distance, supported via ICT. Participation is open to students from universities of different countries provided there are agreements between universities, that means that the teaching and learning activities are recognized by the institutions taking part in the project.

- ❖ Secondly, in the context of international internships virtual mobility can also be used **to facilitate physical international internships (blended) as well as to realize international internships (virtual)**.

An internship or a placement involves three stakeholders: the higher education institution, the student and the receiving company or organization (located in a foreign country, when talking about an international placement). Virtual mobility activities and ICT tools can be implemented to facilitate interaction between these stakeholders and in the different phases of the internship: before phase (matching between offer and demand for an internship, preparation of the activities and tools for communication and assessment), during phase (activities are carried out with the help of mentors in the company and in the university through tele-collaboration), after phase (assessment and credits recognition).

The lines of interaction between the different stakeholders can consist of a combination of face-to-face and ICT-supported communication, of strictly face-to-face communication or of strictly ICT-supported communication. When the interaction between student and company is mainly ICT-supported, we talk about a virtual placement.

- ❖ Finally, related to an internationalised curriculum, virtual mobility can be used as a scenario to **internationalise a (part of a) course** (chapter, exercise, task, project), **workshop, seminar, ...** Again, this can be either fully virtual or blended. For example, students can take a single course of their study program or a seminar run by a foreign university through Virtual Mobility, while all the rest of their studies take place in a traditional ‘face to face way’.



## ICT – Information and Communication Technology

ICT tools and functionalities can support a Virtual Mobility process through technologies mainly oriented toward telecommunication and tele-collaboration.

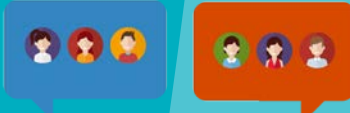
*Examples of ICT tools to support production/communication:*

- Web audio conferencing
- Web video conferencing



**Synchronous - oral**

- Chat
- Instant messaging



**Synchronous- written**

- Video recordings
- Audio recordings



**Asynchronous - oral**

- Blogs
- Wiki's
- Discussion forums
- E-portfolios
- Social media
- E-mail



**Asynchronous - written**

## Get inspired!

### What are the benefits of Virtual Mobility?

Virtual Mobility can offer you many advantages in terms of increasing opportunities to internationalize curricula and to acquire new skills and competences:

- ❖ It facilitates **cultural exchanges and interactions** for students who don't have the possibility to travel.

I decided to join a Virtual Mobility experience because I hadn't had the opportunity to go abroad.

Arianna, University of Padova

- ❖ It gives you **flexibility in accessing learning**, regardless of the geographical location, financial situation, personal circumstances, etc.

The choice of an online training experience was mainly because it allowed me to attend the training course without any major changes to my regular work schedule.

Maria Margarida, University of Porto





- ❖ It widens **options** in terms of **subjects** offered by other universities and of **different learning methodologies**.

There is still a lot of disbelief associated with these courses, but nowadays, there are a lot of excellent Virtual Mobility courses available.

Nuno, University of Porto

- ❖ It **lowers the costs** of mobility.

- ❖ You can develop **tele-collaboration and team work skills**

I've used Virtual Mobility in order to improve my translation and collaboration skills. However this experience gave me the opportunity to get in contact with a different reality and a different environment.

Giada, University of Padova

We had to communicate with different people who had different experiences and then sometimes we didn't understand each other but language and social work improved.

Jovita, Vytautas Magnus University

- ❖ Through the collaboration with people from other countries you can develop **inter-cultural skills** and get aware of different points of view.

Without moving from your home you can actually enter a new world and explore different cultures, attitudes, ways of living and to get to know another culture is actually something that enriches you and widens your world.

Marta, University of Padova

I understood there was another world apart from Italy and my city and there are different points of view and you learn to try to put yourself in others shoes.

Arianna, University of Padova

- ❖ You can meet and become friends with people from different countries and create the basis for physical mobility

In the end, after 2 months of Virtual Mobility program, to have friends from other countries that are inviting you to come to their cities, to visit them, to be there with them, it's something great.

Année, University of Padova



- ❖ You can develop your **ICT skills** through the use of many collaboration and communication tools.
- ❖ It will enhance your **self-responsibility, autonomy and pro-activeness**.
- ❖ It reduces the impact of students' mobility on environment (**green mobility**).

Virtual Mobility is a great way to improve not only personal but professional skills as well. I have used Virtual Mobility courses to improve language skills and technical skills

Nuno, University of Porto

## Get involved!

### Look for quality in Virtual Mobility!

Quality in Virtual Mobility is **ensured by the institutions** taking part in developing and organizing the Virtual Mobility process. However, students are also important in the quality assurance process, as they are the key participants, together with the teachers, in the learning and teaching process and socio-cultural exchange that takes place during Virtual Mobility. Therefore, quality in Virtual Mobility can be discussed in terms of **responsibilities of participating institutions, students and teachers**.

- ❖ **Institutions** are responsible for the **support units that coordinate and organize**

Virtual Mobility. All participants should be informed about the support system available, including academic, technological and cultural support. When administrative issues arise, they are usually solved at the institutional level. However, peer support can also be an effective way to find a solution.

- ❖ **Teachers** participating in Virtual Mobility are responsible for the **quality assurance** of the academic process and curriculum. Your involvement as a student in such a process can be discussed with the responsible teachers and they will inform you about your rights and opportunities.
- ❖ **Students** are mostly responsible for **peer support and feedback** for the institution(s) involved in Virtual Mobility exchange. **The more active you are the better for your Virtual Mobility exchange.** You should get the best out of this experience.

Engaged students can make radical changes and improvements to a given curriculum, while, on the contrary, the best curriculum and Virtual Mobility organization can fail if students participation is very low or there is no international collaboration.





## Certification and recognition

The institution responsible for hosting Virtual Mobility students will decide which **learning outcomes** will be available for students carrying out a Virtual Mobility program, how many related **credits** will be awarded and what **assessment methods and criteria** will be used.

According to the European Commission, full academic recognition is given to the students for studies and courses based on agreements for the evaluation, validation and recognition of acquired competences via Virtual Mobility. In this context, **cooperation agreements** are key to ensuring sustainable mobility schemes<sup>2</sup>.

The condition of existing **student academic records** at a host institution is an obligatory condition in order to get an academic certificate on the basis of study records and to ensure credit transfer recognition by two or more collaborating institutions, on the basis of commonly agreed academic forms and collaboration agreements recognition by two or more collaborating institutions, on the basis of commonly agreed academic forms and collaboration agreements.

## Look for the coordinator in your institution

At a university where Virtual Mobility programmes are running, there is an **administrative office to receive students' applications**.

Often, this task is undertaken by the International Relations Office. This might be different from one university to another. Check who the responsible officer is at your university, they will give you more information.

There might be a **Virtual Mobility coordinator** who can be a teacher, tutor or a person in charge of the international exchange of students. The coordinator provides efficient support for potential Virtual Mobility students during the pre-Virtual Mobility phase and for students during their virtual experience in order to enhance their performance.



<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf)

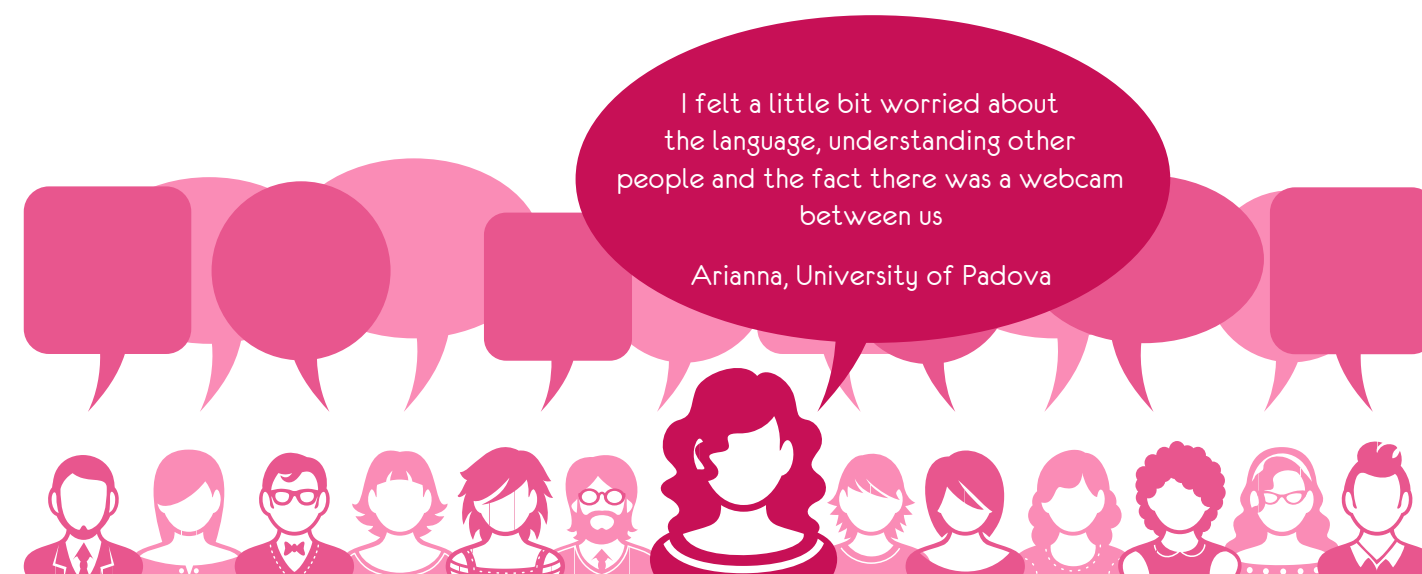
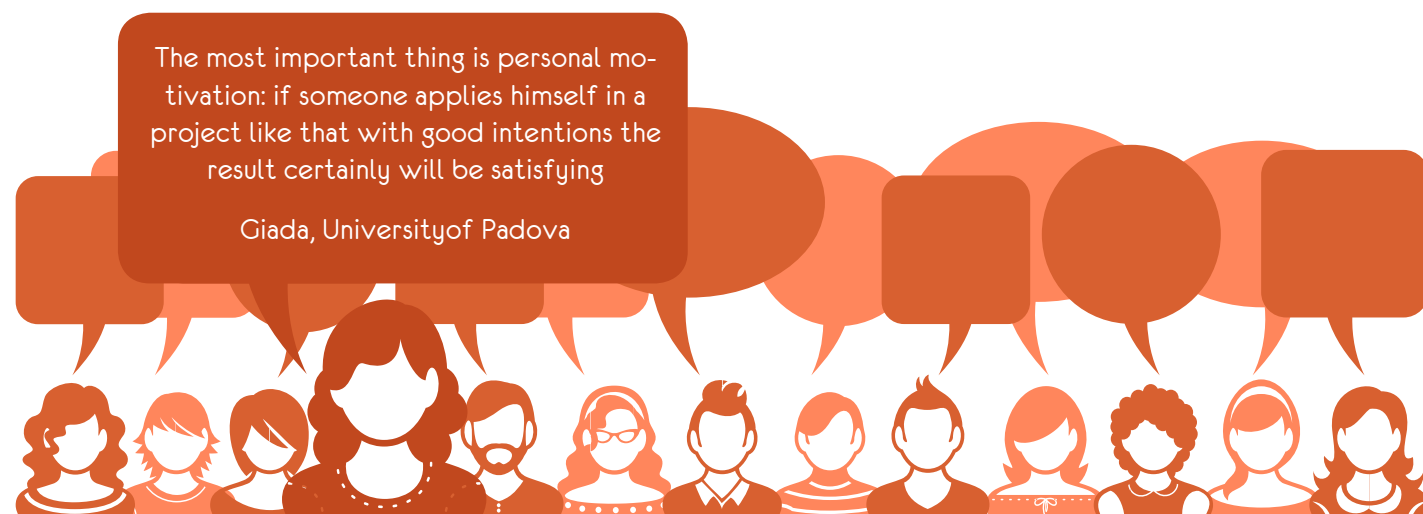


## Virtual Mobility is for all and hence for you!

But how would you know that you have the right skills?

Here is a short **checklist of the characteristics** a Virtual Mobility student should have:

- ❖ Motivation
- ❖ Self-responsibility
- ❖ Pro-activeness
- ❖ Language knowledge
- ❖ ICT skills
- ❖ Respect for diversity and intercultural differences
- ❖ Self-reflection capability



## Want to know more? Links and references

In the VMCOLAB project we have developed a **webpage** for you: **"Virtual For Me"**. The aim of this website is to enhance students' knowledge about Virtual Mobility, its benefits and possible problems to be addressed, to share Virtual Mobility 'Alumni' interviews and to share interviews with experts explaining what Virtual Mobility is, how Virtual Mobility can enhance international study experience and the reason for getting involved in Virtual Mobility.

You can visit the V4me webpage at <http://virtual4me.vmcollab.eu>

Want to know more about Virtual Mobility?

Here are some useful references:

[http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf)

European Commission definition of Virtual Mobility

<http://www.eadt.eu/home/policy-areas/virtual-mobility/about> EADTU -Europe's institutional network for open and flexible higher education- website

### Blended mobility projects:

"European Cooperation in Education through Virtual Mobility - a best practice manual" from the [Being Mobile project](#)

<http://www.europe-now.eu> Europe Now web platform for European mobile students and alumni of a wide range of European exchange programmes

<http://www.euvip.eu> EUVIP - Enterprise-University Virtual Placements

<http://mobi-blog.eu> Mobi-Blog - The European Weblog platform for mobile students

<http://move-it.europace.org> Move-IT - Seminars Promoting Virtual Support For Mobile Students

<http://www.provip.info> PROVIP - Promoting Virtual Mobility in Placements

<http://www.coimbra-group.eu/victorious> VICTORIOUS - Virtual Curricula Through Reliable Interoperating University Systems

<http://vm-base.europace.org> VM-BASE- Virtual Mobility Before and After Student Exchanges

### Virtual Mobility projects:

<http://www.movinter.eu> MOVINTER - Enhancing Virtual Mobility to foster institutional cooperation and internationalisation of curricula

<http://www.net-active.info> NetACTIVE - AIESAD-EADTU Credit Transfer In Virtual and distance Education

REVE - Real Virtual Erasmus

<http://sputnic.europace.org> SPUTNIC - Seminars Promoting the Use of Technologies for Networking and International Collaboration

<http://www.ubicamp.eu> Ubicamp: Integrated Solution to Virtual Mobility Barriers

<http://www.venus-project.net> Venus - Virtual and E-Mobility for Networking Universities in Society

<http://virqual.up.pt> VIRQUAL - Virtual Mobility and European Qualification Framework

<http://epics-ve.eu> EPICS - European Portal for International Courses and Services

<http://vmcollab.eu> VMCOLAB- Virtual Mobility Collaboratory

<http://www.intent-project.eu> INTENT - Integrating Telecollaborative Networks into Foreign Language Higher Education



The VMCOLAB consortium:



<http://www.kuleuven.be>



<http://www.ugr.es>



<http://unu.edu>



<http://www.unipd.it>



<http://www.coimbra-group.eu>



<http://www.vdu.lt>



<http://www.upb.ro>



<http://efquel.org>



<http://www.up.pt>



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